

Insurance Policy Checklist

Are You Prepared for 2015?



The start of a new year is a good time to reevaluate your insurance policies. Changing circumstances may lead to different insurance needs. For example, did you get married, have a baby or even purchase a new car this past year? If so, you will want to check and see if your insurance policies include coverage that suits your needs.

Take some time to talk with your agent and review your policies to see if they meet your current needs. Your insurance agent/producer or company can help determine if your current policies provide adequate coverage or if you might need more or less coverage.

Life Insurance

Changes- such as a birth, divorce, remarriage or even a new mortgage or new job- are indicators that you might need to make changes to your life insurance policy. At the very least, you should review your current policy.

Read your policy carefully and answer these questions:

- Do premiums or benefits vary from year to year?
- How much do the benefits build up in the policy? What part of the premiums or benefits is not guaranteed?
- What is the effect of interest on money paid and received at different times on the policy?
- In what situations and through what procedures can you assess cash values?
- Can the policy be converted into another form of insurance or annuity?

In the case of the birth of a child or a new marriage, you might want to consider increasing your death benefit. Check with your agent to see if your insurance company requires a physical exam before increasing your coverage levels.

Alternatively, events like paying off your mortgage, retirement or children finishing college might mean that you can lower your life insurance coverage and premiums. Your life insurance company might be able to offer "conversion privileges" from your current term life insurance policy to a new whole life insurance policy. You might also be able to expand your death benefits so they can be used while you are still living. Ask your insurance agent or company about these options.

Auto Insurance

Have you had any changes to your driving habits? If so, tell your agent to ensure your auto policy will cover you in case of an accident. Make sure you have a copy of your insurance card and your insurance agent or company's number in your vehicle. Also, take some time to check your auto insurance policy by following the guidelines below:

- Make sure your coverage is appropriate for your life situation. Liability is the part of the policy that pays for any injury or damage if you cause an accident. If your liability insurance is too low, it is possible that you could be sued for any damages above your liability limits.
- Review your deductibles for comprehensive and collision coverage. This is the amount you will pay if your car is damaged or totaled without fault of another driver. Raising or lowering this amount can affect your premium.

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- It is a good idea to accurately record details of an accident if you are in one. The National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) smartphone application WreckCheck walks you through the process of gathering information following an accident. You can e-mail notes directly to your agent. Visit our website, www.doi.sc.gov to learn more and download the free app from iTunes or Google Play.

Health Insurance

You may have recently enrolled or changed your health insurance whether through your employer, Medicare or the federally facilitated marketplace. Make sure you have new insurance cards. Before you visit a doctor, verify that your paperwork is in order.

- Check your policy and provider lists to make sure visits to your doctor and any specialists are still covered by your policy, as network or preferred provider lists change from year to year.
- Read through your documents and make note of copays for in-network and out-of-network providers so you are not surprised later.
- If you're planning a vacation away from home, check with your insurance carrier to identify urgent care centers and hospitals that accept your insurance coverage near your destination and along the way. Ask your carrier about applicable co-pays and deductibles if care is needed.

Homeowners/Rental Insurance

- As a reminder, this is a great time to update your home inventory and make sure your homeowners or rental policy is up-to-date. Take photos or video your prized possessions. Remember to note any antique items and their value so you can talk with your insurance agent to ensure they are properly covered. You can create a home inventory by downloading the National Association of Insurance Commissioner's (NAIC) free smartphone app my.HOME Scr.APP.book. Download the app from iTunes or Google Play.

Protect Yourself

Insurance fraud can happen to anyone, anywhere. Protect yourself in 2015 and beyond by following the tips outlined below:

- Don't give out any personal information- such as your social security number or bank information-over the phone until you have verified the legitimacy of the insurance company and agent /producer with the SC Department of Insurance.
- Ask for copies of everything you sign and keep a copy of the payment receipt or check for the initial premium payment you gave the agent/producer for the policy.
- Call the insurance company if you don't receive a copy of the insurance policy outlining your coverage and its limitation within 30 days of your purchase.
- The best way to protect yourself from insurance fraud is to research the agent and company you are considering. Before writing your check or signing the contract, call the SC Department of Insurance to verify they are licensed to write coverage in South Carolina.

For additional information about your insurance needs and tips for choosing coverage that is best for you and your family, please visit the South Carolina Department of Insurance website, www.doi.sc.gov or contact the Department's Office of Consumer Services Monday- Thursday 8:00 a.m.- 6:00 p.m. and Friday 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. by calling 1-800-768-3467.